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ABSTRACT

In summer 1986, the Instructional Telecommunications Consortium received funding for a 3-year project to collect data on the utilization of telecourses for college credit instruction. In particular, the study examined the different types of telecourses used, the number of courses offered each semester, telecourse producers, number of programs and hours of video in telecourses, telecourse licensing, enrollments in telecourses, systems used for video distribution, and student-instructor interaction. Only courses used to reach distant learners were included in the study. Of the 199 institutions surveyed during the three years of the project (1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89), approximately 80% offer two-year degrees only. Study results included the following: (1) a total of 282 individual telecourses were in use by the participating institutions; (2) "Understanding Human Behavior" was the most frequently used telecourse, comprising 6% of all reported telecourse uses; (3) from 1987 through 1989, there was an increase of approximately 20% in the number of telecourses offered by institutions; (4) on average, responding institutions offered seven telecourses per semester; (5) four major telecourse producers accounted for 82% of the total reported use of telecourses; (6) the average telecourse enrollment was 46.8 students; (7) in over 99% of the telecourses, students were eligible for equivalent credit to on-campus courses; and (8) in 1989, 61% of the uses of telecourses utilized broadcast television. (PAA)

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TELECOURSE UTILIZATION SURVEY PROJECT

THIRD YEAR REPORT: FALL 1986 - SUMMER 1989

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Research Project of the

Instructional Telecommunications Consortium

American Association of Community and Junior Colleges

Funded by

The Annenberg/CPB Project

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Prepared by Ron Brey

June 1990

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1986 the Annenberg/CPB Project awarded a grant to the Instructional Telecommunications Consortium, an affiliate of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. The grant funded a three year project to collect data on the utilization of telecourses for college credit instruction. Only those telecourses used to reach distant learners were included in the project; video series used in conjunction with on-campus courses were excluded.

The contents of this executive summary are extracted from a longer report. A copy of the full report may be obtained from the project director, Ron Brey, or the Annenberg/CPB Project. (See below for addresses.)

The research project has been funded for three more years. The funding organizations are:

Annenberg/CPB Project
Coast Community College District
Dallas County Community College District
Instructional Telecommunications Consortium
The Learning Channel
Miami-Dade Community College District
PBS Adult Learning Service
Southern California Consortium

A major goal of the project over the next three years is to expand the number of participating institutions. If your institution is not currently providing data, it may start reporting data with the current semester.

The project will continue to use the survey forms that were the basis for preparing this report. Each year the project will also conduct a special survey on emerging issues for institutions involved in the production, distribution and use of instructional telecommunications for college credit programs.

Additional institutions are always welcome to participate in the project. The necessary forms and guidelines may be obtained by contacting Ron Brey, P.O. Box 161161, Austin, TX 78716 (512-483-7571). Ron is the Director of Non-Traditional Instruction, Austin Community College, Austin, Texas. The Annenberg/CPB Project may be contacted at 901 E Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20004, 202-879-9600.

TELECOURSE UTILIZATION SURVEY PROJECT

THIRD YEAR REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The report is based on data collected for the 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 academic years. This span of time was necessary in order to develop a longitudinal database that permitted comparisons to be made over a number of years. In addition to presenting the over-all state of postsecondary uses of telecourses, this Third Annual Report also examines current trends.

It should be noted that the data were not obtained from a random sample of colleges and universities in the United States. Only 199 institutions have participated in this project. Between 750 and 1,000 postsecondary institutions use telecourses at least periodically. Consequently, the observations contained in this report may not be completely representative for all institutions. However, the large number of participating institutions does make the findings useful, and it can be assumed that the observations do apply to most institutions offering telecourses throughout the United States.

Approximately eighty percent of institutions participating in the project offer only two year degrees. Consequently, upper level institutions are underrepresented in the database. Other reports indicate that at least one-third to almost one-half of institutions using telecourses are upper level institutions. Therefore, the underrepresentation of upper level institutions in this project limits some of the observations that can be made.

Each of the 7,019 records in the database contains all the data provided in Data Input Sheets A and B. (See the last two pages of this report.) However, additional information, consisting of each institution's 1986 and 1989 headcount enrollment, telecourse producers, and the type of television production for each telecourse, was added to each record in the database.

What follows is a summary of the data in major categories. A thorough description of the data and numerous observations are found in the complete report.

Number of Different Telecourses

Over the three years of the project, an increasing number of different telecourses was offered by participating institutions. The total number of individual telecourses was 282. Understanding Human Behavior was the telecourse most frequently used, for a total of 426 uses. This comprises six percent of all reported

uses of telecourses. Generally speaking, most telecourses were only used a few times.

Number of Telecourses Offered Each Semester

In each of the three years there was an increase in the average number of telecourses offered per institution for the corresponding fall, spring and summer semesters. The increase is almost constant for all three semesters. There was an overall increase of approximately twenty percent from the 1987 through the 1989 academic years. The average number of telecourses increased for the fall semesters from 6.7 to 8.2, spring semesters from 7.1 to 8.5, and summer semesters from 5.8 to 7.1.

The average number of telecourses offered during summer semesters is lower than either in the fall or spring. Institutions generally have smaller telecourse programs in the summer. But as the above data indicate, telecourse offerings for summer programs have also grown over the past three years.

The 199 participating institutions reported data for 972 semesters. Several important observations can be made by examining the number of telecourses offered by each institution in a given semester:

*Only one or two telecourses were offered during a semester twenty-two percent of the time. Thus, many institutions find it worthwhile to offer telecourses even though they offer very few a semester.

*On the average, an institution offers about seven telecourses per semester.

*There is a strong positive correlation between the total headcount enrollment of an institution (its 1986 headcount enrollment) and the total number of telecourses it offers during a semester.

Telecourse Producers

Institutions have reported using telecourses produced by over 100 organizations. These producers can be separated into three main categories.

First, a small number of organizations fund or produce television series that are to be used explicitly as telecourses and marketed nationally to other institutions. Coast Community College District, Dallas County Community College District, Miami-Dade Community College District, and The Southern California Consortium are examples of such organizations. The Annenberg/CPB Project funds productions, but is neither a producer nor distributor. Some of the telecourses funded by the Annenberg/CPB Project are also shown as prime time television

series during their first semester of use. An example is the series Art of the Western World, which was broadcast on PBS.

Television series produced for broadcast but not originally meant for telecourse use form a second source of telecourses. After broadcast they are adapted for use as telecourses. This category also includes training programs produced for commercial training and business organizations.

A third type of telecourse producer consists of colleges and universities that produce telecourses for their own use. These telecourses are not designed to be marketed to other institutions.

Although national telecourse producers and the Annenberg/CPB Project account for only thirty-six percent of the different telecourses, they account for eighty-three percent of the total reported uses of telecourses and ninety percent of the enrollments. They have an average telecourse enrollment of fifty students.

Television series adapted for telecourse use (second type) make up the fewest number of telecourses (fifteen percent) and are the least likely to be used. This lower utilization is due in part to limited releases and legal restrictions on distribution by broadcast or cable television; it is not necessarily due to a lack of interest in offering these telecourses. However, their average enrollment (thirty-six) is higher than that of telecourses produced by colleges for their own use.

Thirty-two institutions have produced telecourses for their own use. Although these telecourses have the lowest average enrollment (twenty-eight), they make up the largest source of telecourses (forty-nine percent).

The data indicate that participation in the production or funding of a telecourse does not have much, if any, relationship to the number of telecourses an institution uses. With the exception of larger institutions, it also does not relate to their average telecourse enrollments.

The four major telecourse producers and the one funding agency listed above have been responsible for the production or funding of sixty-nine different telecourses. These courses account for ninety percent of the total enrollment and eighty-two percent of the total reported uses of telecourses. Their percentage of the total enrollment is greater than that of their total uses because the average enrollment in their telecourses was higher than those of all other telecourse producers. The higher average enrollment in Dallas telecourses results from their national government and history telecourses. Because

these telecourses are core courses at most institutions, they tend to have relatively large enrollments .

Number of Programs and Hours of Video in Telecourses

Telecourses vary widely in the number of programs and the hours of video that they contain. The data show the following:

*The number of video programs in telecourses varied from four to seventy-five.

*The number of hours of video ranged from two to forty-eight. Thus, many institutions do not rigidly define how many programs or hours of video a telecourse must have.

*The majority of all participating institutions reported using a telecourse with either fewer than ten or more than fifteen hours of video at least once. These numbers are outside the typical range for telecourses.

*There has been a clear tendency for series to become shorter than twenty-six to thirty half hour programs. In the 1986-87 academic year, series with fewer than six programs accounted for sixteen percent of all reported uses of telecourses; for the 1988-89 academic year, the corresponding number was twenty-five percent.

*There was also an increase in the use of telecourses with more hours of programming. Those of seventeen hours and more increased from one to three percent.

Institutional Background

There are several institutional characteristics that may affect the number of telecourses offered each semester. Some of these also relate to the number of on-campus classes. Probably the most obvious one is size. There is in fact a strong, statistically significant relationship between the size of an institution and the number of telecourses it offers.

Licensing Telecourses

A number of observations may be made from the data. Although the three major telecourse producers (Coast, Dallas, and Southern California Consortium) accounted for only seventeen percent of the telecourse licenses, their productions accounted for sixty-four percent of the reported uses of telecourses. When institutions used telecourses by one of these producers, three-fourths of the licenses were obtained through an intermediate source, and not directly from the producer.

The PBS Adult Learning Service (ALS) is undoubtedly the primary source for telecourse licenses. However, participating institutions reported it as the source only fourteen percent of the time. Consortia were reported as the license source thirty

percent of the time; it is this datum that causes the ALS to be underrepresented. In most cases these consortia have obtained the licenses from ALS on behalf of their members.

Enrollments

The overall average enrollment per use of a telecourse is 46.8. The median enrollment is thirty-one. The median is less than the average because of the occurrence of a small number of telecourse uses with very high enrollments. The lowest telecourse enrollment was one and the highest 690. A little over one-half of all reported telecourse uses had an enrollment of between ten and forty.

A number of factors affect the average enrollment in a telecourse. The data indicate that the most important relationship is that between an institution's total headcount enrollment and its enrollment in each telecourse: the larger the institution, the larger its average telecourse enrollment.

Participating institutions reported data for 972 different semesters. The average telecourse enrollment per semester for each institution ranged from less than ten to more than 150. For fifty-eight percent of the semesters an institution's average enrollment was between eleven and forty. This means that each telecourse at most institutions has, on the average, an enrollment equal to that of a typical on-campus class at a two year institution or a small lecture class at a large university.

The data show that the number of telecourses offered by an institution in a semester is clearly related to its average enrollment of those telecourses; that is, the average telecourse enrollment increases as an institution offers more telecourses. However, the number of telecourses offered in a semester is also closely related to the institution's total headcount enrollment. (Data from another source indicate that this has not been the case in some large urban areas.) Total headcount enrollment also accounts for the relationship between the average enrollment and the number of telecourses. That is, an institution's size affects its average telecourse enrollment as well as the total number of telecourses it offers. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between average telecourse enrollment and the total number of telecourses offered during the semester.

Academic Departments Offering Telecourses

Enrollments in telecourses offered by business and related departments increased at a slower rate than the institutions' overall growth rate. However, enrollments in telecourses offered by social and behavioral sciences and humanities departments increased faster than their institutions' on-campus enrollments. (Several possible explanations for the business and social and behavioral sciences data are explained in the full report.)

Membership in Consortia Supporting Use of Telecourses

Of the 199 institutions which reported data at least once, 145 (73%) belonged to at least one consortium concerned with telecourses sometime during the three years of the project. Twenty-six different consortia were reported for this project. Over the reporting period, the percentage of institutions not belonging to a consortium decreased from twenty-eight percent to ten percent. This is a significant decline for such a short period of time. The average number of consortial memberships also increased each year from 1.2 in 1987, to 1.3 in 1988 and 1.4 in 1989. Thus, the importance of consortia for institutions offering telecourses continues to increase. (The data probably overrepresent consortia memberships because consortia were more likely to participate in this research project.)

College Credit for Telecourses

In only one tenth of one percent of the reported uses of telecourses (8 out of 7019) did a student receive fewer credits than if he or she had enrolled in the on-campus counterpart. Therefore, when institutions offer telecourses, they carry the institutions' usual number of credit hours.

The data also show that some institutions are willing to offer telecourses for which there are no pre-existing equivalent courses. The adoption of a telecourse results in an addition to the college course catalog. Sixteen percent of participating institutions reported having offered at least one telecourse that had not been offered previously as an on-campus course.

Telecommunications Systems Used for Video Distribution

Institutions reported that the four primary methods used to provide student viewing of telecourse video programs were broadcast television, cable television, library viewing and video tape check-out. Question R of the survey instrument asked the person completing the form to list the methods by which students could view the programs. Up to three methods (expanded to four in 1989) could be listed. These methods were to be ranked by order of importance (usually the most often used method) for students at that institution for the telecourse being reported. Keep in mind that most institutions do not collect this data; therefore, the data is the opinion of the person completing the form. Nevertheless, some very important conclusions can be made from the data:

*Broadcast television was rated as the most important delivery system for almost fifty percent of the reported uses of telecourse; this number remained virtually constant for all three academic years. Both cable television and library viewing were the most important viewing method about one-fourth of the time.

*In 1989, sixty-one percent of the uses of telecourses

utilized broadcast television, seventy-one percent cable television and eighty-four percent library viewing. On the average, each use of a telecourse gave students 2.4 different methods of viewing the video programs.

*By far the biggest change in student viewing options was the dramatic increase in the ability of students to check-out video cassettes of telecourse programs for home viewing. For the 1987 academic year only one percent of the reported uses of telecourses allowed for student check-out, but by the 1989 academic year this had increased to sixteen percent.

*Library viewing was the only viewing option for telecourse students in 11.5 percent of the reported uses of telecourses. One-fifth of all institutions offered at least one telecourse where students could view programs only in libraries.

Student-Instructor Interaction

Question V of the survey instrument identifies telecommunications systems used for student-faculty interaction. (In most cases, U.S. mail and telephone calls also can be used; but they are not measured by this question.) In seven percent of the reported uses of telecourses, students have access to an electronic form of communications with the instructor. The most common method is the use of an audio bridge for discussion sessions.

Grade Level

For ninety-five percent of the reported uses of telecourses, the college credit course was either at the freshman or sophomore level. There was not a major difference in this percentage among the major producers or those funded by the Annenberg/CPB Project. However, seventy-one percent of the uses of telecourses produced by the International University Consortium were at the junior or senior class level, a fact that reflects the mission of its member institutions.

Concluding Comments

The data collected for the 1987, 1988 and 1989 academic years indicate that the offering of college credit telecourses increased in importance during the late 1980s. Two of the observations made in this summary report, and further explained in the full report, substantiate this trend.

*The average number of telecourses used each semester increased substantially.

*Institutions were willing to invest in new delivery systems in order to expand student access to telecourses, and to increase viewing options for students.

Many of the forces that made possible the growth of telecourse use and enrollments in the 1980s will also play an important role in the 1990s.

*The key telecourse producers -- Coast Community College District, Dallas County Community College District and the Southern California Consortium -- will continue to produce new telecourses and revise existing ones.

*The licensing of telecourses through the PBS Adult Learning Service will grow, possibly with additional options and delivery methods.

*Existing viewing options for students, such as video tape check-out and cable television, will increase. New technologies such as compact discs, with video, audio and computer programs, may have a major impact on the production and distribution of programming.

*The need for distant learning opportunities for the U.S. work force will continue to increase as the need to continue an interrupted education or to improve job skills becomes even more important for the adult population.

The major concern telecourse producers and, ultimately users, may have in the 1990s is the availability of funds for the production of telecourses. The Annenberg/CPB Project had a major impact on the production and use of telecourses in the 1980s. However, as of this writing its funding has been terminated, and it is not known if the Project will find alternative sources of funding. Existing Annenberg/CPB Project grants will make many additional telecourses available during the next three years. However, after this pipeline runs dry, there will be a significant decrease in the number and variety of new telecourses available for postsecondary use. Several questions to be answered are: Will the three major telecourse producers be able to expand their production of new telecourses to make up some of this loss? Will the Project be able to find alternative funding? Will new funding sources be identified?

There is a certain irony in the fact that the increase in the number of nationally distributed telecourses may slow or stop at the precise moment when many institutions are realizing that their mission includes meeting the needs of distant learners. The challenge will be to expand existing funding options as well as to develop new ones. The self-interest of institutions that utilize telecourses, as well as that of telecourse producers, distributors and funding agencies, dictate that this challenge must be met as quickly as possible. It will be necessary for these organizations and institutions to develop closer ties and undertake additional cooperative activities in order to provide an increasing number of quality telecourses in the 1990s.

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